
LESSON 2

THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON WARFIGHTING

Introduction

Purpose	This lesson focuses on the impact and differences among various cultures on warfighting in OOTW and discusses some of the unchanging principles in unconventional warfare.
Why Study The Impact Of Culture On Warfighting?	U.S. forces are being increasingly deployed to Third World conflicts. You must be aware of cultural differences between our culture and that of the Third World because those differences can impact on our ability to conduct warfighting.
Relationship to Other Instruction	This lesson reinforces previous OOTW instruction in the areas of insurgency-counterinsurgency and special operations, which are linked to Third World cultures. It also serves as a precursor to the case studies on Haiti, Bosnia, and Algeria.
Study Time	This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 3 hours of study.

Educational Objectives

Effects of Cultural Values and Traditions	Explain the effects that cultural values and traditions can have on the strategy and tactics of U.S. adversaries. [JPME Area 3(a)]
Examples of Historical Failures	Discuss examples of historical failures in 19th and 20th century unconventional warfare caused by cultural misunderstandings. [JPME Area 1(a)]
Cultural Area Specialists	Evaluate the importance of cultural area specialists in OOTW scenarios. [JPME Area 3(a)]
JPME Areas/ Objectives/Hours (accounting data)	1/a/1.0 3/a/1.0

Discussion

Historical Examples

Unconventional warfare is not new in the annals of military history, and the readings on the Zulu and Indian wars show that a high level of unorthodox combat was typical during the 19th century. In both conflicts, cultural arrogance, over-dependance on firepower, poor intelligence, and ignorance of local terrain led to defeat of the more technologically advanced forces.

Impact of Various Cultures

Clan, tribal, religious, and ethnic differences are crucial factors in unconventional conflicts. A major point to keep in mind is that adversaries from Middle Eastern, Asian, Latin American, and African cultures often think differently from you and will therefore fight or "come at" you in ways different from what you expect.

While important, firepower and force structure are only part of the equation in unconventional wars. In Somalia, for instance, any effort to launch an effective warfighting strategy, no matter how superior the force structure, must take into account the socio-political reality of clan rivalries.

Consistent Mistakes

There are a number of consistent mistakes regarding our conduct of unconventional warfare that still apply in today's OOTW environment. These include

- wOverconfidence on the part of conventional commanders
- wFailure to incorporate the native population
- wA dogmatic approach to conventional doctrine

The application of modern technology to the battlefield in the western, and especially in the American way of war, has been only minimally effective in low-intensity scenarios when the enemy refuses to engage or cannot be easily targeted.

Effects of Cultural Differences

Since cultural differences affect the way people reason, live, eat, and work, it stands to reason that those differences also affect their conduct in combat. When we fight in underdeveloped regions of the world, our ignorance of a host country's culture can lead to defeat. Religious, clan, tribal, and ethnic hatreds all influence the outcome of OOTW.

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Discussion, Continued

Examples

WIn Afghanistan, the Soviets attempted to impose, with disastrous results, a secular, urban-based government on a largely rural, traditional Islamic culture.

wIn South Vietnam, the U.S. supported a Catholic minority government against an overwhelmingly Buddhist population.

wU.S. intelligence in Iran was so concentrated on the Communist threat that it was caught off guard by an Islamic revolution driven by a religious fervor that it knew little about.

wU.N. peacekeeping forces in Bosnia and Somalia learned that third party neutrality between warring clans or ethnic groups is sometimes impossible to maintain. There was criticism of the U.N. command in Mogadishu for failing to understand the nature of clan warfare and for viewing Aidid's forces as mere thugs.

wThe French face the specter of terrorism from a fundamentalist revolution in Algeria. The Russians are deeply involved in a low-intensity struggle in Moslem Chechnya, and U.S. forces, armed with the most modern equipment, operate in the midst of a Haitian voodoo culture.

Summary

Like any other institution, the U.S. military is a product of its era and culture. Thus, Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) usually emphasizes a rational, materialistic approach to warfighting based upon logical matrices, end states with western concepts of time and space, and conventional force structure and firepower. However, in many Third World cultures, such measurements are only marginally important. Too often, in unconventional scenarios (Chechnya, Bosnia, Mexico, and Somalia), military planners omit crucial, abstract intangibles like time, terrain, religious or nationalistic fervor, clan hatreds, and ethnic rivalries.

Required Readings

Operations Other Than War (OOTW) Readings wPerrett, Bryan. "Isandhlwana and Rorke's Drift." *Last Stand: Famous Battles Against the Odds*. New York: Sterling Pub., 1991. Volume I, pp. 104-124. Find this reading in the *Operations Other Than War (OOTW) Readings*, Annex B, pp. B- to B-. Bryan Perrett explains the simplicity of the origin of the Zulu War in 1879 and how it can be regarded as a preemptive strike.

wFrost, Lawrence A. "Custer's Last Battle" and "Hero or Fool." *The Custer Album*. Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990. Volume I, pp. 125-140. Find this reading in the *Operations Other Than War (OOTW) Readings*, Annex B, pp. B- to B-. Frost describes the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the events leading up to it.

wFitz-Simons, Daniel W. "Sendero Luminoso: Case Study in Insurgency," *Parameters* (Summer 1993), Volume I, pp. 162-171. Find this reading in the *Operations Other Than War (OOTW) Readings*, Annex B, pp. B- to B-. Fitz-Simons discusses the history, organization, and the bizarre philosophy of Peru's Sendero Luminoso terrorist movement. The author also examines the problems the military and police face in dealing with the movement. The police are woefully underpaid, inviting corruption, and the military is ill-equipped and poorly trained for the challenge of defeating this insurgency.

For Further Study

Supplemental Readings

The readings listed are **not** required. They are provided as recommended sources of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. They will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

wLawrence, T. E. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1938).

wKlare, Michael T. & Kornbluh, Peter. *Low Intensity Warfare*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.

wJoint Pub 3-07, *Joint Doctrine For Military Operations Other Than War*.

Issues For Consideration

Advantages of Cetewayo	Contrast the leadership qualities of the British commanders at Isandhlwana and Rorke's Drift. What advantages did Cetewayo and his Zulu warriors possess?
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Custers' Mistakes	According to the articles on Custer, what mistakes did he make? In what way was he similar to Lord Chelmsford in the Zulu War?
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Cultural Factors	How were cultural factors (history, religion, customs) important in OOTW scenarios like Haiti, Rwanda, and Somalia? Are they also important in today's Chechen and Bosnian scenarios?
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Effects of Cultural Influences	Give some examples from the reading on Sendero Luminoso of how cultural influences affected terrorist strategy and tactics in Peru.
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